



TEXTS ADOPTED

P10_TA(2025)0122

Strengthening rural areas in the EU through cohesion policy

European Parliament resolution of 17 June 2025 on strengthening rural areas in the EU through cohesion policy (2024/2105(INI))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the Commission report of 27 March 2024 entitled ‘The long-term vision for the EU’s rural areas: key achievements and ways forward’ (COM(2024)0450),
- having regard to its resolution of 15 September 2022 on EU border regions: living labs of European integration¹,
- having regard to its resolution of 8 May 2025 on the ninth report on economic and social cohesion²,
- having regard to the opinion of the European Committee of the Regions of 15 March 2023 on targets and tools for a smart rural Europe³,
- having regard to the opinion of the European Committee of the Regions of 1 December 2022 on enhancing Cohesion Policy support for regions with geographic and demographic handicaps (Article 174 TFEU)⁴,
- having regard to Articles 39, 174, 175 and 349 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU),
- having regard to Council Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2020/2093 of 17 December 2020 laying down the multiannual financial framework for the years 2021 to 2027⁵,

¹ OJ C 125, 5.4.2023, p. 114.

² Texts adopted, P10_TA(2025)0098.

³ OJ C 188, 30.5.2023, p. 14.

⁴ OJ C 79, 2.3.2023, p. 36.

⁵ OJ L 433 I, 22.12.2020, p. 11, ELI:

- having regard to Regulation (EU) 2021/1119 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30 June 2021 establishing the framework for achieving climate neutrality and amending Regulations (EC) No 401/2009 and (EU) 2018/1999 ('European Climate Law')¹,
- having regard to Regulation (EU) 2021/2115 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 2 December 2021 establishing rules on support for strategic plans to be drawn up by Member States under the common agricultural policy (CAP Strategic Plans) and financed by the European Agricultural Guarantee Fund (EAGF) and by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and repealing Regulations (EU) No 1305/2013 and (EU) No 1307/2013²,
- having regard to Regulation (EU) 2021/2116 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 2 December 2021 on the financing, management and monitoring of the common agricultural policy and repealing Regulation (EU) No 1306/2013³,
- having regard to Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 laying down common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund Plus, the Cohesion Fund, the Just Transition Fund and the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund and financial rules for those and for the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, the Internal Security Fund and the Instrument for Financial Support for Border Management and Visa Policy⁴,
- having regard to Regulation (EU) 2021/694 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 29 April 2021 establishing the Digital Europe Programme and repealing Decision (EU) 2015/2240⁵,
- having regard to the Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) No 240/2014 of 7 January 2014 on the European code of conduct on partnership in the framework of the European Structural and Investment Funds⁶,

¹ <http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2020/2093/oj>.
OJ L 243, 9.7.2021, p. 1, ELI:

² <http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2021/1119/oj>.
OJ L 435, 6.12.2021, p. 1, ELI:

³ <http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2021/2115/oj>.
OJ L 435, 6.12.2021, p. 187, ELI:

⁴ <http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2021/2116/oj>.
OJ L 231, 30.6.2021, p. 159, ELI:

⁵ <http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2021/1060/oj>.
OJ L 166, 11.5.2021, p. 1, ELI:

⁶ <http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2021/694/oj>.
OJ L 74, 14.3.2014, p. 1, ELI:

- having regard to Principle 20 of the European Pillar of Social Rights on access to essential services,
- having regard to its resolution of 4 April 2017 on women and their roles in rural areas¹,
- having regard to its resolution of 8 March 2022 on the role of cohesion policy in promoting innovative and smart transformation and regional ICT connectivity²,
- having regard to its resolution of 13 December 2022 on a long-term vision for the EU's rural areas – towards stronger, connected, resilient and prosperous rural areas by 2040³,
- having regard to its resolution of 23 November 2023 on harnessing talent in Europe's regions⁴ ,
- having regard to the Commission communication of 27 March 2024 on the 9th Cohesion Report (COM(2024)0149),
- having regard to the Commission communication of 30 June 2021 entitled 'A long-term Vision for the EU's Rural Areas – Towards stronger, connected, resilient and prosperous rural areas by 2040' (COM(2021)0345),
- having regard to the Commission communication of 19 February 2025 entitled 'A Vision for Agriculture and Food – Shaping together an attractive farming and agri-food sector for future generations (COM(2025)0075),
- having regard to the Commission communication of 3 May 2022 entitled 'Putting people first, securing sustainable and inclusive growth, unlocking the potential of the EU's outermost regions' (COM(2022)0198),
- having regard to the Commission communication of 25 March 2021 on an action plan for the development of organic production (COM(2021)0141),
- having regard to the Commission report of 17 June 2020 on the impact of demographic change (COM(2020)0241),

http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg_del/2014/240/oj.

¹ OJ C 298, 23.8.2018, p. 14.

² OJ C 347, 9.9.2022, p. 37.

³ OJ C 177, 17.05.2023, p. 35.

⁴ OJ C, C/2024/4225, 24.7.2024, ELI:
<http://data.europa.eu/eli/C/2024/4225/oj>.

- having regard to the Commission green paper of 27 January 2021 on ageing – fostering solidarity and responsibility between generations (COM(2021)0050),
- having regard to the Commission communication of 20 May 2020 entitled ‘A Farm to Fork Strategy for a fair, healthy and environmentally-friendly food system’ (COM(2020)0381),
- having regard to the Commission communication of 20 May 2020 entitled ‘EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 – Bringing nature back into our lives’ (COM(2020)0380),
- having regard to the Commission communication of 17 November 2021 entitled ‘EU Soil Strategy for 2030 – Reaping the benefits of healthy soils for people, food, nature and climate’ (COM(2021)0699),
- having regard to the UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas, adopted by the Human Rights Council on 28 September 2018,
- having regard to general recommendation No 34 (2016) of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women on the rights of rural women, adopted on 7 March 2016,
- having regard to its resolution of 3 May 2022 on the EU action plan for organic agriculture¹,
- having regard to the study commissioned by Parliament’s Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development entitled ‘The future of the European Farming Model: Socio-economic and territorial implications of the decline in the number of farms and farmers in the EU’, published by the Policy Department for Structural and Cohesion Policies in April 2022,
- having regard to its resolution of 24 March 2022 on the need for an urgent EU action plan to ensure food security inside and outside the EU in light of the Russian invasion of Ukraine²,
- having regard to its resolution of 3 October 2018 on addressing the specific needs of rural, mountainous and remote areas³,
- having regard to its resolution of 9 June 2021 on the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030: Bringing nature back into our lives⁴,

¹ OJ C 465, 6.12.2022, p. 22.

² OJ C 361, 20.9.2022, p. 2.

³ OJ C 11, 13.1.2020, p. 15.

⁴ OJ C 67, 8.2.2022, p. 25.

- having regard to the Commission report of August 2019 entitled 'Evaluation of the impact of the CAP on generational renewal, local development and jobs in rural areas'¹,
- having regard to the opinion of the European Committee of the Regions of 26 January 2022 entitled 'A long-term vision for the EU's rural areas'²,
- having regard to the opinion of the Committee of the Regions of 19 February 2025 entitled 'How post-27 LEADER and CLLD programming could contribute to better implementation of the long-term vision for the EU's rural areas'³,
- having regard to the opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee of 23 March 2022 entitled 'Long-term Vision for the EU's Rural Areas'⁴,
- having regard to its resolution of 19 October 2023 on generational renewal in the EU farms of the future⁵,
- having regard to Enrico Letta's report on the future of the single market, published in April 2024,
- having regard to the study requested by Parliament's Committee on Regional Development, entitled 'EU Cohesion Policy in non-urban areas', published by the Policy Department for Structural and Cohesion Policies in September 2020,
- having regard to the declaration on the future of rural areas and rural development policy in the European Union, adopted by the Rural Pact Coordination Group on 12 December 2024,
- having regard to Rule 55 of its Rules of Procedure,
- having regard to the opinion of the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development,
- having regard to the report of the Committee on Regional Development (A10-0092/2025),

¹ European Commission: Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development, ADE s.a, CCRI, OIR, Micha, E. et al., Evaluation of the impact of the CAP on generational renewal, local development and jobs in rural areas - Final report, Publications Office, 2019, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2762/364362>.

² OJ C 270, 13.7.2022, p. 18.

³ OJ C, C/2025/1703, 26.3.2025, ELI: <http://data.europa.eu/eli/C/2025/1703/oj>.

⁴ OJ C 290, 29.7.2022, p. 137.

⁵ OJ C, C/2024/2658, 29.4.2024, ELI: <http://data.europa.eu/eli/C/2024/2658/oj>.

- A. whereas, currently, 137 million European citizens – nearly one in three – live in rural areas, which account for approximately 83 % of the EU's territory; whereas one third of the population of rural areas lives in a border region; whereas 77 % of land used for farming (134 million hectares) and 79 % of forest (148 million hectares) are located in rural areas;
- B. whereas according to Eurostat, average income in rural areas is 87,5 % of average income in urban areas;
- C. whereas there are still disparities in cohesion policy funding between urban and rural areas, with urban areas receiving three times more cohesion funding than rural areas¹;
- D. whereas since 1991, in rural areas, the LEADER method, subsequently covered by the community-led local development policy instrument (CLLD) through local action groups (LAGs), has demonstrated that it can mobilise and empower local actors around innovative and tailored strategies;
- E. whereas rural areas are a cornerstone of the European economy, home to many 'hidden European Champions', and are integral to Europe's cultural diversity; whereas they are essential for food production and security, serving as guardians of our landscapes, living rural heritage, social and cultural traditions; whereas they play a key role in promoting the strategic autonomy of the EU through the agricultural sector, which remains a strategic priority of the EU; whereas rural areas symbolise many of the aspects that make Europe attractive and liveable;
- F. whereas the promotion of minority languages can enhance awareness of local specificities, increasing the attractiveness of tourism and fostering economic activities linked to culture, education, craftsmanship and traditional products;
- G. whereas the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted a shift in perception among the public, who have recognised the potential of rural areas as a solution to the challenges arising from crises by providing a safer, more sustainable and reliable living environment;
- H. whereas cohesion policy funds alone cannot answer the increasing needs and challenges faced by rural areas in the EU; whereas greater synergies and complementarities with other EU policies, in particular with the common agricultural policy (CAP), must be ensured in order to maximise the impact of investments in rural areas, advancing the modernisation of agriculture and the development of essential services and infrastructure;

¹ European Committee of the Regions, *EU annual report 2024 – The state of regions and cities*, 7 October 2024.

- I. whereas over 40 % of land in rural areas is used for agriculture yet sadly the contribution of agriculture, forestry and fisheries to rural regions has decreased, both in economic and employment terms, to 12 % of all jobs and 4 % of gross value added;
- J. whereas Parliament's study on the future of the European farming model notes that the EU could lose 6,4 million farms by 2040, falling from 10,3 million in 2016 to 3,9 million;
- K. whereas, in accordance with Articles 174, 175 and 349 TFEU, the EU aims to reduce development gaps between the different regions and coordinate its policies, including using the European Structural and Investment Funds to achieve the objectives of economic, social and territorial cohesion, with a particular focus on rural areas;
- L. whereas all regions must remain eligible for funding in future cohesion policy, even strong regions facing significant transformation challenges;
- M. whereas regional actors have a deeper understanding of which projects should be prioritised for support through cohesion funds, ensuring that resources are allocated in a way that best meets the specific needs of their territories;
- N. whereas cohesion policy funds to rural areas should be further simplified with the objective of reducing administrative burdens, not only for the final beneficiaries but also for the relevant authorities, thereby also contributing to increased absorption rates;
- O. whereas rural areas in particular are facing demographic and structural challenges, such as ageing, population decline, brain drain, growing inequalities between men and women, disparities with urban areas, structural changes in the agricultural and forestry sectors, the consequences of natural disasters, the increase of energy and transport prices, a lack of services and infrastructure, in particular for vulnerable people and persons with disabilities, the impact of these challenges on income level and on the labour market, with a consequent higher unemployment rate, and a persistently large digital gap;
- P. whereas demographic challenges are particularly acute in the EU farming population, with the majority of farmers being over 50 years old;
- Q. whereas strengthening cohesion in rural areas requires the adoption of measures and initiatives aimed at supporting families, also by helping young people and parents in balancing family and professional life, thereby contributing to the sustainable development of those communities;

- R. whereas Europe's rural areas and European farmers already play a crucial role in the climate transition, as they are the most affected by climate change both economically and socially, and whereas thanks to their efforts, some of the adverse impact of agriculture on the environment has been significantly reduced over the years; whereas the EU agricultural sector significantly reduced its greenhouse gas emissions by 24 % between 1990 and 2021 and it is responsible for 72 % of renewable energy production and holds 78 % of the untapped potential;
- S. whereas demographic changes do not affect all countries and regions equally, but have a greater impact on less developed regions, as they exacerbate existing territorial and social imbalances; whereas solutions must be found for regional imbalances and for the uneven pace of convergence between regions, some of which remain stuck in a development trap; whereas less developed regions require particular attention and support, as is the case with the EU's rural areas and the outermost regions, due to their specific characteristics;
- T. whereas the overall percentage of the population living in rural areas has fallen significantly across the EU over the past 50 years, particularly as a result of ageing and emigration; whereas the highest percentage of people over the age of 65 is found in rural areas¹; whereas estimates suggest that by 2033 the population of Europe's rural areas will have shrunk by 30 million people compared with 1993;
- U. whereas the lack of or poor access to healthcare, water services, affordable housing, transport, digital infrastructure, education, financial services and recreational and cultural activities worsen the reputation of regions, and particularly rural, borderland, inland, cross-border, mountainous, insular and outermost regions, as places to live and work, especially for women, young people, ageing populations and minorities; whereas cross-border areas are particularly affected by the lack of regional connectivity in terms of transport and digital infrastructure; whereas rural areas are strongly affected by the lack of stable employment opportunities, which forces young people, in particular women, to migrate;
- V. whereas the availability and quality of water play a critical role in ensuring equitable, sustainable and productive rural livelihoods;
- W. whereas greater emphasis should be placed on preventive measures to strengthen the resilience of Europe's rural areas to natural disasters; whereas an integrated approach to water resources management is essential both to prevent floods and to cope with droughts, in particular through a coherent use of EU funds;

¹ SWD(2023)0021.

- X. whereas rural areas, especially in eastern, southern and Mediterranean Europe, are the most directly affected by energy poverty and face specific challenges related to desertification, forest fires, climate change and its associated asymmetrical risks, water resource scarcity and weak infrastructure, which require a targeted approach within cohesion policy;
- Y. whereas rural areas are home to the majority of the EU's biodiversity, yet protected habitats and species remain in poor conservation status and continue to decline due to climate change and the degradation of soil and water quality, with a negative impact on natural resources; whereas biodiversity loss has severe economic consequences for the agricultural sector and negatively affects the attractiveness of rural tourism;
- Z. whereas the clean energy transition, the diversification of the economy and the expansion of renewable energy sources present significant opportunities for rural and less developed regions, allowing them to leverage their natural resources and geographic advantages and to exploit their full potential for the future production of renewable energy;
- AA. whereas these areas bear the brunt of depopulation, and whereas it is mainly young people leaving them as a result of job shortages and dim career prospects, and this fuels the rural exodus, resulting in an increased share of older residents and a greater risk of social isolation;
- AB. whereas rural areas have the highest share (12,6 %) of young people aged 15-29¹ not in employment, education or training (NEETs);
- AC. whereas generational renewal is one of the nine key objectives of the CAP;
- AD. whereas farms, dairy farms, wine-growers and olive oil producers across Europe go out of business every day, and few farms like these are managed by farmers below the age of 35; whereas the ambitious goals of the green transition entail opportunities and also risks for economic, social and territorial cohesion, as well as for European agriculture;
- AE. whereas the way we produce food has shaped the landscapes that define Europe; whereas dynamic rural areas foster quality food production which in turn supports their economy; whereas reinvigorating these connections between food and territory and revitalising rural areas will be essential for the future of farming in Europe;

¹ EU annual report 2024 on the state of regions and cities.

- AF. whereas a robust cohesion policy is essential to guaranteeing the effective application of the ‘right to stay’ principle in rural areas, which requires action on many levels, including by fostering economic stability and preventing depopulation; stresses that ensuring access to a basic set of public goods and services for all citizens, especially young people, regardless of where they live, is crucial; whereas it is necessary, to this end, to promote targeted investment in infrastructure, services, education, and innovation;
1. Welcomes the Commission report of 27 March 2024 entitled ‘The long-term vision for the EU’s rural areas: key achievements and ways forward’ and agrees with its overarching objectives;
 2. Takes note of the four areas of action underpinning the rural vision and the 30 actions making up the EU rural action plan; calls on the Commission and the Member States to place its implementation at the top of the agenda;
 3. Stresses the key role rural areas have to play in shaping the economic models and the social and territorial organisation of the various Member States, particularly as the cradle of agricultural and food production, but also as custodians of an irreplaceable cultural and landscape heritage; notes, however, that their significance remains under-appreciated and inadequately funded; believes that the EU has a duty to push for a true revival and regeneration of these areas, going to extra lengths to endow our rural areas with the right tools to overcome the considerable long-term challenges they are facing and which are having an ever greater impact on regional competitiveness and social cohesion, in order to preserve European diversity and ensure that the Union’s progress does not come at the expense of rural areas and their populations;
 4. Considers it important to develop short supply chains and to promoting the use of labelling schemes to acknowledge the quality and variety of traditional products from rural areas; stresses that public canteens, such as school and hospital canteens, can play a significant role in the development of short agrifood supply chains;
 5. Recognises the key role of small and medium-sized towns as development centres in rural regions and calls on the Commission and the Member States to specifically strengthen their economic, social and infrastructural functions, revitalise city centres, better utilise synergies between rural areas and large metropolitan regions, and ensure more balanced territorial development;
 6. Stresses the urgent need for measures to combat poverty in rural areas by developing targeted strategies to improve social security, create economic opportunities, and support particularly vulnerable populations, in order to break the cycle of poverty;

7. Stresses that rural areas are key players in mitigating the effects of climate change; emphasises the need for increased investment in research and innovation for rural areas, particularly in the fields of sustainable agriculture, renewable energy, digital transformation and innovative mobility solutions, to enhance the competitiveness and resilience of rural regions and create energy self-sufficiency and new employment opportunities; encourages the sustainable management of forests and the prevention of forest fires, also by promoting the use of biomass which is gathered without harm to forest ecosystems;
8. Calls for the expansion of renewable energy in rural areas based on their potential to reduce energy costs with the involvement of civil society and local communities; emphasises the need for financial incentives, measures such as renewable energy communities and simplified administrative processes to boost regional energy independence and sustainability while avoiding negative impacts on food production, land availability and prices, as well as on social cohesion; calls for a dedicated financing mechanism for the installation of photovoltaic, wind and other renewable energy sources;
9. Calls for increased support for the preservation, restoration and conversion of older buildings, including historical buildings, churches and other places of worship, sports halls and schools in rural areas to improve energy efficiency, sustainability and safety; urges investments in the modernisation of public infrastructure while preserving historical structures where possible; calls on the Commission and the Member States to promote targeted policies that support the renovation and energy-efficient retrofitting of rural housing, financial incentives for first-time rural homebuyers, in particular for young people and families, and the development of sustainable and affordable housing projects adapted to the needs of local communities that contribute to the attractiveness and revitalisation of these regions;
10. Asks the Commission to assess and to implement Article 174, 175 and 349 TFEU in full to close the development gap among regions, including in relation to infrastructure, and to see to it that all EU policies not only apply the 'do no harm to cohesion' principle, but also that they follow a more assertive 'promote cohesion' approach wherever possible, particularly in rural areas and in areas particularly affected by industrial transition, demographic challenges and depopulation, and those at risk of depopulation, such as outermost regions, islands, border, cross-border and mountain regions;
11. Calls on the Commission to devise a rural strategy for the post-2027 programming period; urges the Commission and the Member States to ensure the incorporation of a rural dimension in relevant policies

and to make sure that the strategy promotes the economic and social development of rural areas and to allocate specific resources to the modernisation of agriculture, supporting rural small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and start-up and promoting short supply chains in order to make rural areas more connected, competitive, resilient and attractive to young people and investors, thereby ensuring balanced and sustainable development in the long term and enhancing the quality of life; stresses, in this regard, the importance of having a truly effective rural proofing mechanism at EU level so to assess the potential of all relevant policies and to mitigate any possible negative impacts they may have on rural areas;

12. Stresses that in order to ensure the long-term prosperity of rural areas and support a strong agricultural sector to maintain this prosperity in rural areas, it is essential to strengthen the synergies between EU Structural and Investment Funds and Horizon Europe, the EU's flagship research and innovation programme, and the CAP in the next multiannual financial framework (MFF);
13. Calls on the Commission to present, by 2027, a report on the application of the rural proofing mechanism to policies and interventions at EU level, as well as the results obtained;
14. Calls on the Commission to prioritise focused investments and policy measures to support the transition to a new generation of farmers in order to modernise EU agriculture and create more opportunities in rural areas;
15. Highlights the crucial role of cohesion policy for the development of rural areas as a decentralised, powerful tool for economic and social development, allowing all regions to tackle these specific challenges of the Union; underlines in this regard that cohesion policy should continue to be a key pillar of the MFF post-2027, with an allocation that is maintained at a minimum threshold equivalent to the current MFF 2021-2027 levels, ensuring its fundamental role in reducing regional disparities and shaping a more resilient and competitive Europe that leaves no one behind; calls for the option of providing adequate resources for rural and mountainous areas to be explored in the next cohesion policy framework and complementing GDP at regional level with other indicators; recalls that the fundamental principles of cohesion policy, such as partnership, multi-level-governance, a place-based approach and shared management, must be respected in order to foster development and to meet the specific needs and challenges of rural areas with a particular focus on tools supporting sustainable growth and development and youth and female employment, including among victims of violence against women, and improving services and infrastructure;
16. Believes that smart specialisation and economic diversification strategies could promote more opportunities in rural areas;

emphasises, in particular, the key importance of integrating the concept of smart villages into cohesion policy and of explicitly supporting the development of smart villages, with flexible funding and an integrated approach, as an innovative tool for enhancing the quality of life and revitalising rural areas and services through digital and social innovation and initiatives such as the promotion of working spaces in order to attract workers, including remote workers, and to contribute to revitalising local economies;

17. Encourages initiatives that promote economic and social sustainability, including support for rural entrepreneurship, rural tourism and new business models based on innovation and digitalisation;
18. Calls on the Commission to ensure a strong and holistic focus on the development of rural areas in the future cohesion policy, in such a way that all policy initiatives are consistent with the goal of reducing territorial disparities; believes it is essential to devise long-term strategies to support rural areas, centred on the principles of cohesion and sustainability and providing the necessary tools to address demographic, social and economic challenges, in order to ensure that these areas do not become forgotten places, but rather key players in Europe's future without needing to continually depend on extraordinary measures; calls, in this regard, on the Commission to support the significant development of rural areas in the future cohesion policy, and to commit to setting up local info points and offering a platform and financial support to enable Member States to exchange information and best practice on funding possibilities, with a view to providing local authorities with effective support and assisting with resource management and the implementation of development initiatives; emphasises, furthermore, that the effective participation of regional, local and rural authorities and a strong administrative capacity are crucial for the reduction of the excessive administrative burden and complex requirements for recipients and for the effective execution of cohesion policy funds; highlights that multi-funding still appears difficult in some countries and calls on the Commission to enhance complementarities between the EAFRD and cohesion policy funds;
19. Stresses the need for an integrated European strategy for the revitalisation of rural areas, including through the development of bio-districts, recognising their potential to diversify the rural economy by targeting fiscal, economic and social measures to maintain the active population; also highlights the value of introducing incentives for the relocation of health, education and public administration professionals, as well as the importance of partnerships between local authorities and the private sector for the creation of new jobs;

20. Underlines that expanding integrated territorial investment (ITI) plans and unlocking their full potential could establish them as a cornerstone for integrated regional, local, and rural development; emphasises that strengthening ITIs' role in rural areas is essential to foster territorial cohesion, enhance connectivity and drive inclusive economic growth by supporting key sectors such as agriculture, rural SMEs, tourism and renewable energy; calls, furthermore, for greater flexibility in ITI implementation, increased financial allocations and reinforced synergies with other EU funding mechanisms, including LEADER and CLLD, key instruments for fostering bottom-up participatory rural development and for keeping and restoring living and thriving local rural economies, to maximise impact and actively involve regional and local authorities and civil society in line with the partnership principle;
21. Suggests that all relevant Directorates-General of the Commission conduct a territorial impact assessment of their respective policies at least twice per programming period; believes that these evaluations would establish a more precise baseline and identify ways to integrate the characteristics of rural areas into EU policies more effectively;
22. Calls on the Member States to make full use of all measures supporting rural, inland, mountainous, insular and outermost regions, as well as cross-border regions and regions at the EU's external borders, including those bordering Russia, Belarus and Ukraine which are most affected by the war, to mitigate economic disruption and to secure their future and prosperity; welcomes the new BRIDGEforEU Regulation and asks the Member States to implement it, enhancing the cooperation between cross-border regions to enable economies of scale when providing basic services and infrastructure in the rural areas affected;
23. Stresses the diversity of the EU's rural areas, for which the long-term vision calls for solutions that are tailored to the needs and resources of rural areas while reinforcing long-term strategies for sustainable growth; underlines in this regard the need to fully involve local and regional authorities, which are best placed to identify current challenges and needs at the regional and local levels; highlights the importance of maintaining a decentralised model for the programming and implementation of cohesion policy based on the principle of partnership and multi-level governance and a place-based bottom-up approach; calls, therefore, for the strong involvement of regional and local authorities to ensure more direct access for local and regional authorities to cohesion policy funds, reducing bureaucratic complexity and shortening disbursement times, through more streamlined procedures, intuitive digital platforms and increased technical support for local beneficiaries; proposes encouraging the use of pre-financing and advance payment schemes for small projects in rural areas;

24. Stresses that centralisation may lead to bureaucratic inefficiencies and delays in fund absorption, ultimately reducing the effectiveness of EU investments in rural development;
25. Highlights that the management approach to rural areas' development policies needs to be coordinated, integrated and multi-sectoral in its implementation and that reinforcing a multi-level approach in line with the subsidiarity principle is essential to ensure its success;
26. Highlights that resilience is essential to enable authorities at local and regional levels to mitigate, adapt to and recover from sudden challenges, ensuring community well-being, security and long-term sustainability;
27. Calls for an adequate share of cohesion policy funding to be allocated to the border regions and calls in this regard for the European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTCs) to be granted a higher degree of autonomy in selecting projects and using funds, in particular by designating EGTCs as managing authorities for Interreg programmes, strengthening their institutional and financial capacity; recommends furthermore that EGTCs be granted a more significant role in achieving policy objective 5, namely bringing Europe closer to its citizens;
28. Underlines the need to strengthen democratic and political participation in rural areas by promoting active civic engagement and digital tools; calls on the Commission to support initiatives that foster local democratic processes to improve cohesion between urban and rural regions;
29. Highlights the need for rural areas to be able to provide essential high-quality services of general interest to the public to improve their livelihood and to harness their strengths to achieve sustainable development, for which they should receive sufficient financial support; underlines, to that end, the need to provide equal access, in particular to vulnerable people and people with disabilities, to all healthcare services, transport and connectivity services, including innovative mobility solutions, specific plans for affordable housing, water services, education and training services, digital infrastructure, and other basic services such as postal and banking services, ensuring their accessibility and affordability in order to guarantee proper living conditions; calls, therefore, on the Commission and the Member States to facilitate access to funding and tailored support measures for social economy initiatives that address local needs and contribute to regional development and, at the same time, to reinforce the financial support offered to rural SMEs, in particular through easing access to financial resources, cooperatives and local value chains that foster economic diversification;

30. Stresses the strategic importance of water resources for rural areas and highlights the need to provide sufficient resources, under the cohesion policy and in rural development programmes, for maintaining and upgrading the water network; recommends, in particular, the inclusion of measures to combat leakage, improve the efficiency of supply systems and promote the sustainable use of water resources in rural areas;
31. Regards it as essential to place greater emphasis on preventive measures to enhance the resilience of Europe's rural areas in the face of natural disasters; believes that an integrated approach to managing water resources is paramount in order to simultaneously prevent floods and tackle drought – two growing threats in many rural regions – within both agriculture and the food sector; acknowledges that depending on the context, building dams and reservoirs or upgrading existing facilities is a priority, while striking a balance between built infrastructure and relatively low cost soft measures, not least because they can be a clean source of energy; notes that although cohesion policy already supports initiatives in this area, additional projects and increased investment are needed, in line with national and regional risk management strategies, to ensure that rural areas are better prepared for, and able to withstand, climate-related extreme weather events;
32. Stresses the growing threat of climate risks such as natural disasters, desertification and water scarcity for many rural areas in Europe, particularly in southern Europe and in the Mediterranean basin; calls on the Commission to promote forward looking adaptation strategies at national, regional and local levels, including water management, resilient infrastructure and disaster preparedness, and calls for investments in innovative water infrastructure, such as the reuse of treated wastewater and smart irrigation systems, and the construction of reservoirs for rainwater harvesting;
33. Notes that rural areas suffer from limited access to essential healthcare services, with a shortage of facilities and medical personnel, and therefore calls for improved access to quality healthcare, including mental health services;
34. Calls on the Member States and local authorities to safeguard essential services that are vital to the development of rural areas by refraining from imposing economic constraints on healthcare in rural areas, as this would lead to the closure, or a fall in the number of, first-aid facilities and basic hospital structures, which should be strengthened;
35. Calls on the Commission and Member States to develop a plan for mobile medical units and for telemedicine, the strengthening of medical services including medical spa services, community health

nurses and digital health solutions and incentives for doctors working in rural and remote areas;

36. Calls on the Commission to incorporate specific measures targeting areas identified as rural into its eHealth strategy, in order to provide local healthcare units with practical support for technological upgrades, and to promote the services such units offer; stresses that Member States should also be offered a screening programme targeting rural areas and that administrative support should also be put in place to assist with the drawing up of plans and prevention registers; calls on the Member States to take into account the particular characteristics of these areas and to encourage rural pharmacies to be set up, in order to specifically adapt pharmacy networks to a rural area, with coordination arrangements for medicines and medical devices supply, with the aim of streamlining and adapting the needs of healthcare units to the individual area; calls on the Member States to improve the provision of primary care and support services among these pharmacies termed 'rural';
37. Highlights the key role that infrastructure development has to play in the economic and social growth of rural areas, given the need for transport systems, particularly public ones, with the capacity to improve connectivity and access to essential services, for energy networks, including renewables, and for suitable digital connectivity infrastructure; notes, in particular, that the quality of transport and digital connectivity should be improved so that people have easy access to labour, schools, hospitals, public services and job opportunities; underlines that road, rail and maritime transport links need to be developed or upgraded through EU co-funded programmes to reduce the isolation of rural areas, in particular from urban centres, narrowing the existing gap, and to facilitate sustainable mobility of people and goods; calls for a comprehensive strategy to improve mobility in rural areas, with a strong focus on sustainability, the expansion of charging infrastructure and the promotion of e-mobility; emphasises the need for targeted investments in public transport, shared mobility solutions and alternative transport models to ensure accessibility and connectivity for rural populations;
38. Stresses that the digital divide between rural and urban areas remains significant, hindering equal opportunities for all residents; calls on the Commission and the Member States to accelerate investments in broadband connectivity, including 5G, better mobile coverage, high-speed internet networks, digital farming solutions and rural innovation hubs, ensuring that digital transformation benefits rural communities, while paying special attention to the regions less prepared for this transformation, including remote areas and outermost regions; stresses that these investments are crucial to enhancing productivity, supporting small farms' entrepreneurship, facilitating remote working, accessing e-services and online teaching

and ensuring that rural areas remain competitive in the digital age; stresses the need for digital literacy and vocational training initiatives to support the integration of digital technologies into the rural economy and to bridge the existing technological and economic divides;

39. Stresses the importance and interconnectedness of military mobility, rural infrastructure development and regional security; underlines the overlap between the EU military mobility network and the Trans-European Transport Network;
40. Calls for strategies to address vacant buildings and promote alternative housing concepts in rural areas, including affordable housing, renovation projects and intergenerational living; emphasises the need for incentives to repurpose empty properties, support community-driven housing initiatives and ensure sustainable, inclusive living spaces;
41. Stresses the importance of promoting priority policies that support young people, as the main actors of the rural exodus, and calls on the Commission to ensure them an effective application of the 'right to stay' through targeted measures, designed to stem the demographic decline in rural areas and to encourage talented people to remain there; believes that individuals who wish to contribute to the development of their local communities should be provided with ample opportunities, and that it is therefore urgent to eliminate barriers and the significant disparities between young people in urban and rural areas in terms of access to high quality education, economic independence, social and political engagement, and intergenerational social interaction; calls for concrete measures and targeted funding programmes, including a brain drain action plan from the Commission, to support young people and young entrepreneurs, providing them with all the tools and resources they need to help them to access agricultural lands, jobs and business opportunities; notes that such measures should include improved access to public services, educational and cultural facilities, access to housing, low-interest loans and, with due regard to the principle of subsidiarity in fiscal matters, tax-related incentives to help young people build a stable future in line with their aspirations, without needing to abandon their place of origin, and creating incentives to settle down in or return to rural areas; considers it necessary, therefore, to promote measures to diversify the rural economy by harnessing local potential, including in areas outside agriculture and tourism, and to create quality jobs;
42. Highlights the importance of boosting vocational education and training while also fostering youth-led initiatives and non-formal learning for young people to develop specific skills related to the economy of rural areas, as a tool for social cohesion and quality employment, with a view to combating depopulation in those areas;

43. Highlights the key role of awareness raising and knowledge-sharing campaigns in advancing various education campaigns and programmes, and the importance of making them an integral part of school curricula; stresses the increasingly worrying data on early school leaving and to that end, calls on national and local authorities to reorganise their school systems to guarantee the right to education in their territories, bearing in mind the serious and objective difficulties they may face; calls on the Member States and local authorities, therefore, not to merge existing schools management structures in those areas;
44. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to provide for new subsidised credit facilities that can support young entrepreneurs and women in their activities, including alternative forms of guarantees for access to credit; calls for financial support to empower young farmers, ensuring growth in rural economies;
45. Welcomes the new EUR 3 billion loan financing package from the European Investment Bank (EIB) Group for agriculture, forestry and fisheries across Europe as a tangible initiative to close the funding gaps for SMEs in agriculture and the bio-economy and facilitate financing for young farmers and women; calls on the EIB Group to explore new forms of support to provide liquidity for actors along agricultural and rural value chains;
46. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to promote local start-ups and incentive programmes for the return of young people and for the purchase and renovation of housing by young people in rural areas;
47. Calls on the Commission to establish a European fund for youth entrepreneurship in rural areas, with a special focus on regions affected by high youth unemployment and brain drain; notes that this fund should support rural start-ups, innovative agriculture, sustainable tourism and digitalisation through dedicated financial instruments and tax incentives;
48. Draws attention to the need for universal equal access to measures enabling everyone to develop the high-quality skills they need to achieve their professional goals, and to vocational and educational training; laments the fact that in rural areas, in many fields, the work of women is currently not rewarded with equal opportunities and conditions, as they often face extra challenges, including limited access to job opportunities, a lack of adequate measures to help them juggle work and family, and a shortage of childcare facilities; emphasises the need to foster an environment conducive to female employment, with support for all families, ensuring high quality early childhood education and care systems and parental support;

49. Calls for increased support for women in rural areas, particularly through measures to improve access to employment, education, healthcare and social infrastructure, as well as protection from violence and violence prevention, to promote their economic and social participation; emphasises that targeted programmes should be created to support female entrepreneurs in rural regions in order to strengthen their economic independence;
50. Stresses that support for women in rural areas is imperative for a variety of reasons, including promoting gender equality, fostering economic growth, advancing community development, reducing poverty and ensuring environmental sustainability; highlights that women play a multilevel role in rural development, as workers, farmers and business owners, and stresses that their importance in rural areas and local economies is often overlooked; stresses that special attention should be paid to women in rural areas when designing structural social support and regional development programmes; highlights that addressing these barriers is crucial for empowering women and unlocking their full potential in rural communities;
51. Calls on the Member States and the Commission to boost awareness regarding existing and future EU funding possibilities for women entrepreneurs in rural areas and to make it easier for them to access financial support; encourages the Member States and regional and local authorities to make use of the existing EU structural and investment funds to promote women entrepreneurs;
52. Calls for gender-equality employment policies and targeted measures to promote a better work-life balance in rural areas, including flexible working models, digital work opportunities, improved leisure and education offerings, and the promotion of community-based care and support structures for families;
53. Urges the Commission to adopt measures to protect the family farming model that underpins the rural territory, is more environmentally friendly and guarantees food security in the EU; stresses the need for a EU system of incentives to limit the accumulation of agricultural land in private investment funds and the consequent increase in land prices; insists on the protection of small and medium-sized farms by strengthening the role of cooperatives and professional farmers in EU policies; furthermore, encourages the Member States to implement concrete measures to support these farms by simplifying access to credit, modernising rural infrastructure and giving impetus to agricultural cooperatives;
54. Stresses the key role played by agriculture and the agri-food sector in food production, ensuring food security in the EU and job creation – a role worth championing since as it constitutes a mainstay of the local economy and is a key factor in ensuring sustainable land

management, and also drives the growth and development of inland and rural areas, which often enjoy international recognition for their outstanding typical products; notes that it is necessary to help farmers innovate and diversify, while at the same time fostering farm competitiveness; believes that the transition to a more sustainable model requires a balanced approach, mindful of local specificities and the economic needs of rural communities, without imposing changes liable to hinder their long-term development; calls, in this regard, on the Commission and the Member States to take strong and targeted action by reducing excessive regulatory burdens and ensuring fair market conditions, to mitigate the decline in the number of farms and encourage generational renewal; calls for adequate support to promote food self-sufficiency and crop diversification; highlights in particular the specific structural challenges of the outermost regions and their rural areas;

55. Urges the Commission and the Member States, in order to strengthen food security and ensure that European farmers do not face unfair competition from products that do not meet the same environmental, animal welfare and food security standards, to enforce strict equivalence of production standards for agricultural products imported into the EU and calls on the Commission, in this regard, to ensure that trade agreements uphold European agricultural standards and ensure a level playing field for EU farmers;
56. Acknowledges that the ambitious goals of the green transition entail opportunities as well as risks for EU agriculture; emphasises that the number of farms in the EU decreased between 2005 and 2020 by about 37 % and calls on the Commission and the Member States, in this regard, to take action to mitigate the decline in the number of farms and support their revenues and competitiveness, in order to stem the desertion of these areas and encourage generational renewal;
57. Points to the need to simplify administrative procedures for accessing EU funds by reducing red tape for farmers and small rural businesses and improving coordination between the institutional levels involved in the management of funds in order to ensure that resources are provided more efficiently and in a more timely manner;
58. Points also to the need to provide these areas, as well as businesses and farm and forest holders, with sufficient financial support, including support for the purchase and maintenance of equipment, with a view to increasing European competitiveness;
59. Is fully aware that rural areas play a key role in the green and digital transitions; underlines that the transitions have to be implemented gradually, along the lines of achievable goals; calls in this regard for

EU funding to be better linked with environmental sustainability and biodiversity protection;

60. Highlights the need to support rural communities in European regions that have been most adversely affected by the trade in or export of Ukrainian agricultural products;
61. Points to the importance of compensatory measures for farmers and rural businesses to ensure that the ecological transition is fair and practical and does not lead to new socio-economic disparities; highlight that for this transition to be successful, the full involvement and collaboration of all stakeholders, in particular farmers and foresters, will be key;
62. Highlights that promoting agriculture is a necessary component of any strategy for rural development, but that on its own it is not sufficient, as not all people in rural areas are employed in the agricultural sector or live in agricultural structures;
63. Recognises that tourism is frequently a major source of income for rural, mountainous, insular and outermost regions, as well as in the Mediterranean region, with the potential to encourage job creation and entrepreneurship and to draw in growing numbers of visitors curious to discover their nature, traditions and cultural heritage through the unique experiences on offer; believes, for that reason, that tourism should be supported through investment in the rural economy, in synergy with the agricultural, fishing, food and cultural sectors, and that the EU should promote the co-existence and further development of these sectors;
64. Highlights that rural and agro-tourism can be a complementary activity to agriculture, offering opportunities for diversifying farm incomes and benefiting the development of rural areas, and that resources should therefore be allocated to the development of tourism and HoReCa activities;
65. Underlines the need to promote rural tourism in a way that is sustainable; highlights the importance of optimising the economic benefits of tourism for rural areas, while minimising the potential negative impacts on local communities and ecosystems;
66. Emphasises the importance of protecting and promoting linguistic minorities in the rural areas of the EU, recognising them as an integral part of Europe's cultural heritage and as a driver of regional development; therefore calls on the Commission and the Member States to allocate cohesion policy resources to support projects for linguistic promotion, training, cultural tourism and local entrepreneurship connected to the linguistic and cultural traditions of the regions;

67. Urges the Commission and the Member States to boost tourism in rural and depopulated areas or areas at risk of depopulation, by financing initiatives that enhance historic villages and traditional local products and establishing new green paths and other nature trails, as well as a label recognising outstanding environments in rural and nature tourism along similar lines to the 'blue flag' awarded to beaches;
68. Notes that in some Member States, municipalities play a crucial role as drivers of regional economic development, benefiting from substantial tax revenues generated by their local economies; highlights that these revenues can motivate municipalities to invest EU cohesion funds in increasing their future tax base, promoting long-term local economic growth and securing long-term tax revenues; to this end, calls on the Commission, with due regard for the principle of subsidiarity in fiscal matters, to initiate a dialogue on the potential benefits of sharing taxes on economic activities with municipalities;
69. Insists that excessive bureaucracy should not prevent farmers from focusing on sustainable food production and rural economic development; calls on the Commission and the Member States to include a strong rural dimension in the future cohesion policy regulations and to promote better regulation as a matter of priority, in order to reduce administrative burdens and to take steps to ensure the competitiveness of rural businesses, particularly SMEs, cooperatives and citizen-led communities, and to promote easier and more efficient access to funds, cost reductions and simplified application and evaluation processes for EU funding, especially for small beneficiaries; reaffirms that optimising procedures, cutting red tape and enhancing transparency are vital to improving access to the available resources; calls on the Commission, therefore, to provide adequate advisory services and technical assistance to managing authorities, thereby also contributing to increased absorption rates;
70. Calls for a more integrated approach between EU industrial and cohesion policies, ensuring that regional development strategies are aligned with industrial transition efforts, particularly in northern, sparsely populated areas;
71. Emphasises the importance of SMEs in technological sectors for rural digitalisation and economic resilience; calls on the Commission to ensure that public measures support local businesses and foster proximity-based economies, avoiding criteria that may disadvantage smaller enterprises;
72. Stresses the need for better alignment between existing territorial development instruments and Structural Funds, including initiatives such as Harnessing Talent and the Covenant of Mayors;

73. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council and the Commission.